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NUGGET
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NOT GUILTY;

Or, Barefoot Billy's Fortune.

By GAFFER GRAY.



BILLY PLACED HIS STRONG ARM AROUND THE WAIST OF THE GIRL, AND TOGETHER THEY LEAPED FROM THE BURNING SHIP INTO THE SEA!

NOT GUILTY; OR, BAREFOOT BILLY'S FORTUNE.

By GAFFER GRAY.

CHAPTER I.

A NIGHT AT MOLLY GRABETT'S.

In one of the narrowest of the narrow lanes at the "North End" of Boston, many years ago, there stood an ancient tenement-house, filled with the lowest representatives of humanity, whose pursuits were of the most questionable character. In a corner of one of the cellars of an old building near it, there had been kept, for a long time, a den where cheap food and cheaper liquors were sold, the largest income received by the rough dame who presided over this "retreat" coming in from the sale of the detestable rum she dealt out to her wretched patrons.

This place was known among its frequenters as "Molly Grabett's Crib."

On the occasion when this record opens, a score of the rude men and women who habitually visited the place, had kept up their orgies to a later hour than usual. Suddenly a struggling footstep was heard on the shaky stairway, as if the approaching person had lost his foothold on the slippery steps, and the next moment the door was thrown open, and a stranger to the startled crowd stumbled in among them headforemost.

"Hallo!" shouted offended Molly Grabett, in a coarse, reproofing tone. "What kind of a caper do you call that?"

But the stranger rose to his feet at once, offered a bungling apology for his clumsiness, and said, "nobody's hurt, mum," in a good-natured way, and approaching the little bar, called for a drink.

This mollified the old woman directly.

"What'll you hev?" she asked, more civilly.

"Whisky, Molly, and give me a good stiff horn, too. It's awful cold, to-night," he answered, feebly.

"As I live!" exclaimed the woman, as she poured out the poison and pushed the glass toward him; "as I'm alive, it's Mister Robson! What's the matter wi' your eye, Mister Robson? Well, I never!"

The man made no reply. He was not very much intoxicated, though he was fairly in the way to be so.

"How'd that happen? I didn't know yer. W'y, it's a bad clip, that—eh?" continued the woman, inquisitively eying the bruised head of her customer.

But Mister Robson gave her no answer. He placed a small silver coin on the counter, and went to the end of the room, where he seated himself upon a bench beside the stove.

He had been in the dark corner but a few minutes, when, leaning his head against the rough cellar partition, he quickly went to sleep.

The noisy throng of tattered vagrants who had been there all the evening, carousing and drinking, had had their laugh over the new-comer's accident, as he burst in upon them so suddenly, but they turned again to their riotous fun, and seemed to take little heed of the stranger, until one of them noticed his condition beside the stove.

"Snores like a bull," said one.

"Who is he?" queried another, for no one seemed to know him there.

"A cop," ventured one, "in disguise, maybe."

"Look at that peeper, though!" exclaimed a fourth, pointing to the stranger's disfigured eye.

And then all crowded round him, for another visitor at that moment approached the old woman anxiously, and in a low voice inquired:

"Say, Molly, has father been 'ere?"

"Well," replied the dame, stoutly, "what of it?"

"'Cause mother sent me, and I can't find him. An' if he comes 'ere, she don't want you to sell him no liquor, please, and she'll pay you jest the same's if he drank, if you won't let him have none."

"Oh, run home, Billy. He hain't bin here often, and he don't come here," said the woman, as her motley crew took the cue from her, and, crowding closer about the drunken father of this pale, shivering boy, they hid him from his sight.

"Go home, Billy, and get under the bed clo'es, or you'll freeze your naked toes this cold night," muttered the keeper of the crib.

"An' if he comes, you won't let him have no rum, will you, Molly?" persisted the child, moving out.

"Go along," said the woman, roughly. "Go home, Billy!"

And the tired little fellow left the cellar.

"Good joke, that!" muttered one of the vagabonds, as the boy crept up the croaking stairs and out into the cold streets in search of his drunken father.

But he had often been abroad thus in the cheerless darkness, during the past two years, upon the same mission, at his poor mother's request, and he didn't mind the cold, the rain, or the rude winds he encountered.

It was "Barefoot Billy," William Robson's only son.

The roughs in the cellar, meanwhile, had contrived to clear Robson's pockets of what little money he had, and shortly afterward he awoke. The stifling atmosphere and his last heavy potation had somewhat stupefied him, but he was sufficiently himself to be able to stagger up to the bar again, and mutter in a husky voice:

"'Nother glass, Moll!"

"O' what?"

"'Nother glass, I said,"

"Whisky?" asked the woman.

"Yes—a snifter; come! It's awful cold—'ere—ain't it—eh?"

And eagerly seizing the half-filled tumbler, he turned the fiery contents down his fevered throat, while his frame shivered from a sudden chill. Then he turned toward the door with unsteady steps, without paying for his last drink.

"Did you fergit?" queried Molly.

He made no reply, but looked around the now vacant cellar, (for the visitors had all left,) and still approached the door.

"Did you pay, Mister Robson?" persisted the woman.

He halted at the second demand, fumbled in his pockets, muttered incoherently, and found that his money was gone.

"Chalk 'er down. All right, Molly. Pay nex' time."

And, with these words, Robson tumbled up the steps he had an hour previously tumbled down; and then went out into the dark streets in quest of his home in the upper attic of the crazy tenement house, where his exhausted wife and two children had for some time been in bed.

It was past midnight. The street and lanes were deserted, and the cold northerly wind pierced the very bones of the poor drunkard. But he staggered to his miserable attic, neither knowing nor seeming to care how he got there.

"Is it you, Will?" murmured his wife, feebly, as he stumbled in at the attic door.

But her erring husband was dumb. She rose from her lowly pallet, drew off his clothes and shoes, and helped him into bed. She had no light except the waning moon, and did not discover the injury her husband had received until next morning.

Repeating the prayer that she had so often uttered for his reformation, the afflicted woman turned once more to rest.

She had been married to this man twelve years. The elder child—Barefoot Billy—was nearly eleven, the daughter over seven. For four long years she had suffered from poverty, sickness, and the neglect of him who should have been her supporter, and she was now well nigh heart-broken.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOWLY DEATH-BED.

On the night described in our first chapter Will Robson mounted the stairs that led to his dreary home for the last time! He had fallen upon the curbstone and injured his head very severely, and the chill that he had experienced was but the precursor of his death. The next morning his wife found his head swollen frightfully. A raging fever succeeded, which went to his brain. Delirium ensued. The children cried for food, and for fear of the violence the father at first exhibited. But this trouble proved only temporary, for he soon became weak and exhausted.

There was very little food in the cupboard, and no medicine. A charitably-disposed physician was induced to go up to the room where Robson lay; but he could do nothing for him.

"He is dying, ma'am," said the doctor.

"Dying!" exclaimed the wife, mournfully. "Oh, sir, I hope he is not so bad as that. I trust he may live and recover from this dreadful attack, which has been brought on through his own imprudence; and I'm sure it will serve for a lesson that he can never forget. He will reform—he will live to care for us."

"His pulse is very low," said the doctor; "and you say he has taken no nourishment for nearly a week?"

"No, sir; he has been too ill; and I hadn't much in the house, you see, and the children are hungry, and I am worn out, utterly."

And the unlucky wife burst into tears.

"I will send you some oatmeal; make it into gruel, and add a little good brandy to it. Feed him with this and he may keep along."

"Brandy, did you say, doctor?"

"Yes, he must have a stimulant, if you can get it into his stomach, or he'll starve, ma'am."

"I haven't any liquor here, sir."

"Well, I will see what can be done. I will return shortly," said the doctor, retiring.

And the well-meaning physician departed in search of the oatmeal and brandy. But he had known nothing of the sad case until that day, and William Robson was beyond being restored.

It was too true; the poor drunkard was dying. The discoloration had disappeared from his bruised eye, the swelling had subsided, the fever had apparently abated; but the brain had been wrecked. He lay twelve days on that lowly bed, and failed to recuperate from the hour he was placed upon it, when he came home from Molly Grabett's crib.

The gruel was administered by the hand of his watchful wife, who hung over him, devotedly, to the last; but it was too late.

A few minutes of semi-consciousness came over him once or twice in the last hours, but he sunk slowly, and finally his lamp of life went out. He died as the fool dieth, the victim of his own recklessness and his insatiate love of strong drink, and was laid away in a pauper's grave.

Robson was buried, and the widow turned to the care of her little ones with a heavy heart. She "trusted in God and was not afraid;" yet the shadows which had long lowered over her were deepening, even at that hour! She kept up her courage, for a time, and continued faithfully to work, for her labors had no need to flag! She was constantly supplied with overalls to make up, by a great slop-shop near by, and had work in plenty to do—such as it was. This liberal concern—which amassed its twenty or thirty thousand dollars of profits annually—paid this industrious woman eight cents a pair for these cheap garments. And she could make two pairs in a day! Sometimes, in the long days, or by toiling till midnight, she could finish three pairs—or their equivalent—and thus she could earn twenty-four cents in sixteen hours. It was good, fair pay—contended the clothiers—all they could afford to give. If she did not want the work there were others who were ready to take it. And twenty-four cents a day was a dollar and a half a week—almost. What could these needle-women expect to earn? It was "very good pay," thought the merchant, "and this woman ought to be thankful that she could get it, indeed."

And so she was! She did not complain. She labored incessantly, week after week, "till her brain began to swim, till her eyes were heavy and dim."

But she found that so much of her time was necessarily occupied in this duty of toil for sustenance, that she devoted but little attention to her boy's and girl's welfare, and so the little ones passed a good deal of their time in the streets poorly clad, and were growing up among the idle and vicious.

The boy was rarely seen with a shoe upon his little feet, save in the coldest of weather; and thus he had acquired, and for a long time bore the name of "Barefoot Billy."

CHAPTER III.

"WANT A BOY, SIR?"

Barefoot Billy had in his time picked up a great many chips, to provide the fuel with which his destitute mother cooked the little family's poor fare at home, but he had never picked up any useful learning yet.

His years had been passed in the streets mostly, or about the docks and ship-yards, and he had never had any schooling.

For a few months after the father's death matters went on more quietly, but the pecuniary affairs of the family did not improve.

Barefoot Billy was still abroad in the highways, and he frequently earned a few pennies for running upon errands, holding strangers' horses at the curbstones, or doing trivial jobs for those who knew him. He carried all his petty earnings to his mother, and the money he thus obtained was a very acceptable addition to the general fund which went to feed the trio, who continued to occupy the tenement-house.

But the mother's health failed at last. The everlasting stitch, stitch, stitch, and her various trials had broken it down. Within a year a hectic flush spotted her once fair cheeks, and her eyes became sunken. Yet she held up bravely and worked as hard as ever.

The children grew older. Cally—the daughter—who had been thus named after her mother (Caroline), was nine years old. The boy had reached his thirteenth year, and both were at home—when not in the streets—living upon the poor mother.

Pretty little Cally loved her parent devotedly, and Barefoot Billy was in no wise behind his sister in affection. He earned all he could, and was constantly on the look-out to earn more,

but he had never been taught to do anything in particular; and he was fast growing up to a life of worthlessness.

About the time he was fourteen years' old he told his mother one day that he was tired of running about the docks, and that he had resolved upon getting a place somewhere where he could earn his livelihood.

The mother was gratified at this determination, but she had little faith in the child's ability to carry it out.

"What is your plan, Billy?" she asked, kindly.

"I don't know that, mother."

"What can you do?"

"What do other boys do?"

"But other boys can write and read, and have friends to help them to a trade, or in some other business where they can be useful."

"Yes, I know. But *all* the boys ain't so lucky. Some of 'em can't read nor write."

"Well," said the mother, encouragingly.

"There's Tom Bluff who used to be on the wharf with us—he couldn't read, and he's got a place in a shop where he gets three dollars a week."

"Three dollars a week, Billy!" exclaimed the woman.

"Yes, mother; and I'm going to git such a place if I can."

And forthwith the spunky little lad went about it.

In his self-assurance and innocence Barefoot Billy started up town one day in search of employment, in the rough garb he had worn, without thinking for a moment how shabbily he was attired, or that this circumstance would scarcely prove a recommendation for him to anybody's favor. He went into a small store that struck him favorably outside, with the inquiry:

"Want a boy, sir?"

The man who presided over this grocer's shop looked at the poorly clad urchin, and answered gruffly:

"No!"

"Know anybody wants a boy, sir?" continued Barefoot Billy, shrewdly, determined not to be put off easily.

"No. What boy wants a place?"

"Me, sir. I do," said Barefoot Billy, promptly.

"You! Who are you? What's yer name?"

"Billy Bare—Billy Robson, sir."

"What'd yer say?"

"Billy Robson, sir," repeated the boy, a little chop-fallen for the moment.

"What can you do?"

"Anything, sir," replied Billy, at a venture.

"That's nothing," said the man. "Can you write well?"

"No, sir, I can't write much," said Billy, humbly.

"Do you know the multiplication table?"

Barefoot Billy had never heard of this particular piece of furniture, and was very little acquainted with any kind of "table," indeed.

"The what, sir?"

The man repeated the question crustily.

"No sir," said Billy, "I don't."

"Can you read?"

"No, sir, I can't."

"Where do you come from?" asked the man, rudely.

"Cross Alley's, where I live, sir."

"Down to North End?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where's your father?"

"Dead, sir," said Billy, dropping his under lip.

"What did he die of?"

"He was sick—sir—and died," continued Billy, "a good while ago."

"How long?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You don't appear to know much, anyway, boy. Got any mother?"

"Yes, sir; and a good mother, too."

"Why don't she send you to school?"

"She can't. She's sick, and poor, and—"

"No excuse. Don't cost nothin'. Schools free. I got my eddication in the public schools; and your mother ought to send you there. How old are you?"

"Fourteen, sir."

The man looked the lad over again, critically.

"Where's your shoes, boy?"

"Don't wear 'em in warm weather, sir."

"I don't want no boy—lad. Go home to your mother. Tell her to send you to school. You're a poor creetur, anyhow. No! I don't want no boy now."

And Barefoot Billy returned to his mother, and related his first attempt to "get a place."

CHAPTER IV.

BAREFOOT BILLY DOESN'T GIVE IT UP.

Mrs. Robson saw the difficulties Barefoot Billy must encounter, from the fact that he possessed no qualifications for entering a store; but she saw also that his rough attire and shoeless feet were quite as much against his prospects as his lack of education. Still she encouraged him, and little Cally, young as she was, urged him not to give it up.

"And I sha'n't, mother. I'll try it again. Better luck next time, p'raps. But I want my duds fixed up better, and I want my old shoes. Where be they?"

The outboards were ransacked, and the old, worn shoes, which had served the boy two winters already, were found at last under the bed. He dug them out of the dust, and cleaned them nicely.

Mrs. Robson tore the binding from an old coat to serve for a new pair of strings, and during that evening she carefully rubbed and cleansed the boy's plain jacket, and pants, and frowzy cap. In the morning she trimmed his hair, he washed himself up nicely, and by nine o'clock he was ready for another excursion in search of a place, looking very much improved in his personal appearance, and, under the circumstances, quite presentable—for Barefoot Billy.

He kissed his sweet little sister, whom he dearly loved, bade his mother good-by, and disappeared down the stairs in search of a place again.

"Poor Billy!" sighed the widow, "I hope he'll succeed, I'm sure. But there isn't much chance for him, I fear, in these hard times."

All day long did Billy Robson pursue the object he now had in view. He went into store after store without encouragement, receiving only curt answers or careless replies to his oft-repeated question:

"Do you want to get a boy, sir?"

But all this did not dampen his ardor in the pursuit he had so laudably undertaken.

"I will get a place," he said to himself. "If not to-day, then to-morrow, or next day, or next week, or next month. I'll have it," and he did.

When he reached home that night, Billy went up the long flight of stairs which led to his mother's attic very nimbly, for his little heart was full, and he was anxious to tell his mother and dear little Cally all about his success at last.

He bounded into the old room, exclaiming, cheerfully:

"I've got it, mother! I've got it, Cally! Come here, and give me a kiss, and I'll tell you all about the place I've agreed to go to."

And taking Cally in his arms he embraced her, and then told them both how it all came about.

"Well, you see, mother," he went on, "I meant to have a place somewhere, somehow, and I went into lots o' shops but they mostly said 'No—don't want you,' when I asked them if they'd like to hire a boy. At last, I was comin' home, pretty tired, but not discouraged—only beat out with walkin', you see, when I saw a paper on a door-post, with writin' on it, in large letters. I couldn't read it, but I said to a man, 'What does that paper say, sir?' He looked at me kinder curious, and answered:

"Can't you see? It's *Boy Wanted*—apply within!"

"I went into the shop directly, and says I, 'Do you want a boy, sir?'"

"Who be you?" he said.

"My name's Billy Robson," says I.

"Ever been in a store?"

"No, sir. Come right from home."

"How old are you?"

"Fourteen, sir."

"When can you go to work?" says he.

"To-morrow mornin'," says I.

"How much money do you expect a week?"

"Mother would be satisfied if I earned three dollars a week, sir," I answered.

"Very good," says he. "You may come to-morrow. Tell your mother to send me a line approving, or come and see me. I will give you three dollars a week." Here's his card," said Billy, triumphantly. "I go there to-morrow, sure."

The widow thanked Heaven that night that her boy had been thus provided for; and next morning, bright and early, the little fellow trotted away to the store to commence operations, taking with him his mother's written approval, and her earnest blessing and injunction to be faithful and dutiful in his new vocation.

"Above all, Billy," she concluded, "be honest in all your comings and goings, and with whomsoever you may have to deal. Never touch a penny of anybody else's without their knowledge, and remember that the eye of God is ever on you in all your movements. Be good and industrious, and I'm sure you'll succeed and gladden your poor mother's heart always."

She kissed her boy, and he went about his work in cheerful spirits. But he soon found that it was an irksome position, and that the man had been continually changing his shop-boys for a year, because they all got worn out with the duties imposed by this task-master.

He was paid promptly three dollars every Saturday night, and this was much for his encouragement. But he was continually trotting, sweeping, dusting, tugging up with the coal, putting up and taking down the shutters, until he was wearied out completely.

But he stuck to it bravely, and got his three dollars a week, until one day something happened which changed this poor boy's fortune.

CHAPTER V.

THE WIDOW PASSES AWAY.

For six or eight months Billy continued to work at his new place faithfully, and the three dollars a week he received, in addition to what the mother still contrived to earn, served to feed and clothe all three as they had not been clothed and fed for a long period previously. But, in the last three weeks, Mrs. Robson, who had toiled all day with her needle, and had devoted all her evening to teaching the two little children to read, began visibly to decline, and a few days before the incident occurred to which we alluded at the close of the last chapter, the mother had a violent attack of bleeding at the lungs, which alarmed both herself and the children greatly.

"Heaven's will be done," she said, resignedly, when Barefoot Billy and his sister sat beside her bed, and strove to comfort her. "I long feared this, babies, and prayed that it might pass away, this bitter cup! That I might be spared to care for my children, in a measure, until they could better care for themselves. But, if it is God's will that I shall be taken away from my loved ones, He doeth all things well, my children, I am content."

During her recent opportunity to teach them, they had made considerable advancement. Billy could read fairly, and knew the multiplication table by heart. Cally read pretty well, and was getting on nicely. The boy could write his name clearly, and was improving daily, when death summoned the loving but long-suffering mother away, peremptorily, and her spirit departed to that world where the wicked cease to trouble, and the weary are at rest.

Two years before this event occurred there had been a remarkable religious revival in the churches in the northern part of the city, and hundreds of new converts were gathered into the fold during that period, among whom were several of the wickedest men and women of that ilk.

At one of the prayer-meetings held on Sabbath evenings at this time, Molly Grabett was in attendance, for, notwithstanding her rough exterior and the doubtful traffic she carried on during the week, she was a pretty regular attendant at church on Sundays. And Molly was suddenly awakened during this revival, and subsequently became a professor of religion, and a professor of the goodly hope of the honest, earnest Christian.

She forthwith closed the old crib, relinquished the sale of spirituous liquors entirely, moved to a small shop and chambers near Commerce street, where she sold only eatables and small wares, and came to be a very good neighbor and valuable friend to those whom she had formerly harmed through her original business.

Among those to whom she was ever ready to lend a hand in need, after her conversion, was the family of Robson. She knew very well that her old "crib" and haunts like that had been poor William Robson's ruin, and the cause of his death. And when she came to realize the peril of her own soul, and the wrong she was committing toward others, the enormity of her offense and the grossness of the error induced her to fall before the altar and beseech Heaven's forgiveness for the sins she had so long committed in her ignorance and selfishness. She remembered Robson's family, and she was not an unfrequent visitor there after her reformation.

During the final sickness of the mother of Barefoot Billy and Cally, Molly was in and out, and made herself very friendly and useful to Mrs. Robson in the last days of her life.

"You are very good, Molly," said Mrs. Robson. "I hope to recover from this attack in the Lord's good time; but I am very ill now, and it may be I shall be called suddenly away."

"Indeed I hope not, mum. The little ones need the mother's care now, at their age, if ever; and I hope you may live to see

'em grow up and bless you yet. The little girl is growin' nicely, and the boy is doing well at the shop."

Molly thus encouraged the poor widow, and during her last illness brought in little comforts and sat with her, and helped take care of the children, in her rude way.

The widow died, and Molly superintended her quiet burial. There were few mourners, and no relatives at the funeral, except the boy and girl. Molly had the body of Mrs. Robson placed in a grave near that of her husband, at Copp's Hill. And thus, at last, the parents of Barefoot Billy and Cally Robson lay side by side in their final resting-place.

When the earth was thrown upon the coffin of their loved mother, the little orphans turned slowly away from the grave, to go—alas, they knew not wither. But Molly Grabett lingered beside them, and, in her rough but friendly manner, tried to cheer and comfort them.

"Where are you going, Billy?" she inquired.

"I don't know, Molly—back to the shop, I suppose."

"And then?" pursued the woman.

"I can't tell," responded Billy.

"An' me, too," said Cally, looking up in the old woman's face inquiringly.

A tear filled Molly's eye, which she quickly brushed away.

"Mamma said God would take care of us," murmured the little girl; "and He will—won't He, Molly?"

"Yes—yes—little 'un. Come with me now."

"Shan't we go home no more, Molly?" inquired Cally, innocently.

"Home?" she replied, half to herself; "home, Cally? You have no home now. But you shall not want for shelter while I has a ruff over my 'ed, nor while I have a crust. Come!" she continued, taking the children's hand in her own. "God will provide for us all. We will lean on Him. He will not forsake the fatherless and they that put their trust in Him. Come!"

"To your home, Molly?"

"Yes," replied the old woman. "I've plenty o' room and enough for us all, thank Heaven, at present. You shall go to the store, Billy, and get your three dollars a week, an' I'll see to your clo'es and meals. Cally shall help me in my little shop, an' can be very useful. We'll live together, an' I'll be a mother to you both till you can do semethin' better for yourself. It isn't much I've got, but God is over all. We shan't suffer. Billy's earnings are consid'able—an' we'll get on," concluded Molly, hopefully, as the trio moved away from the grave-yard.

But new troubles were directly before them, which they little anticipated.

CHAPTER VI.

WAS BAREFOOT BILLY A THIEF?

Barefoot Billy had been absent from his place two days, in attendance upon the death and funeral of his mother. On returning to the store he was astounded to hear his employer announce to him that his services would no longer be required in that establishment.

"I couldn't help it, sir," said Barefoot Billy, humbly, as the tears started afresh at the thought of being thus summarily discharged on account of his absence, which he imagined to be the cause.

"You couldn't, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Then you admit your guilt, do you?"

"Guilt, sir!" exclaimed Barefoot Billy, looking up suddenly through his tears, and utterly confounded at these threatening words.

"Well, no matter. Go home and tell your mother I don't want you any longer. I don't see how you had the cheek to come here again—I don't."

"I haven't got no mother!" said Barefoot Billy, bursting again into tears.

"No mother! What's the matter, boy?"

"Mother's dead, sir."

"Dead? When?"

"An' buried, sir—yesterday."

"Well, I'm sorry. Here's your money for this week. I can't help it. But you must go away from here. I can't have you here any more. That gentleman's pocket-book can't be found, and he's one of my best customers. He says there was no one here but you when he paid his bill except me. He left it in this store—you went off directly after he went out. You haven't been seen for three days since. I can't have nobody 'round me that ain't honest—and I won't," concluded the storekeeper, with emphasis.

This was the first that Barefoot Billy had heard of any lost pocket-book. He remembered the circumstance of the payment of the customer's bill, just before he went home hurriedly on the

night his mother died, but the insinuations of his employer astounded him. Was he suspected of being the wrongful possessor of the missing pocket-book?

"You don't think me a thief, do you, sir?" asked Barefoot Billy, when the light broke in upon him, at length. "I hope not, sir, any way."

"I don't know nothin' about it," continued the master, indifferently. "I didn't steal it, at any rate. This I know. You were the only other person in the shop at the time it was lost. The man can't find it, and you can judge who is naturally suspected. This comes of takin' strange boys into our stores, of whom we know nothin'. I sha'n't do it again. Now, you can go. I won't have even suspicious boys 'round me. Find the pocket-book, or restore it, an' I'll forgive you. But you must look sharp. The police are put on your track. You can't go fur with it. Now—go!"

Barefoot Billy went out of that place where he had been so hardly worked, though fairly paid, for the best part of a year, with a crushed spirit.

He knew no more about the lost pocket-book than did his dead mother, and on arriving home he told Molly the whole story.

The ire of Dame Grabett was aroused at this cruel allegation against the boy, and his subsequent discharge.

"What kind of a pocket-book was it?" asked she.

"I don't know, Molly; I never saw it," replied Barefoot Billy, honestly and frankly.

"Was there money in it?"

"So I suppose. He didn't say."

"And he thinks you stole it?"

"Plainly, 'cause he says 'bring it back an' I'll forgive you.' How can I bring it? I don't know nothin' of it, an' they can't find it."

"It's a bad job, Billy."

"He says the p'lice is lookin' after me sharp," continued the lad, alarmed. "S'pose they nab me; then I'll go up for certain."

"Why, Billy?"

"Oh, I hain't got no friend 'at 'll help me out o' this scrape, you see, an' I'll go up, sure."

"No friend?" said the woman. "An' where is Molly Grabett all this time, I'd like to know?"

"Well, Molly, you'll stand by me. You don't think I'm a thief, do you?"

"No, indeed, I do not. If they take you up I'll go wi' you, and go your bail; and we'll see 'bout this, to be sure," said Molly, bravely. "Heaven forgive this man. But he's a liar when he says you stole the money, I think."

"He on'y says he and I was the two persons in the shop after the man went out and lost it, and that one of us is the thief, which he isn't; that's what he says, Molly."

"Well, I call that a pooty powerful insinuation, any way," concluded Molly, turning aside to answer the shop-bell, and a customer, who just then entered.

Molly went into the front shop at the sound of the bell, and instead of finding a patron there, was confronted by a well-known officer of the police force.

"How are you, Molly?" he said. "Where's Barefoot Billy?"

"What'd you want o' him, Grabb?" asked the woman, quickly, suspecting the cause of this person's visit to her place.

"Oh, he's here, yer know. 'Tain't no use o' tryin' to dodge the issoc with me, Molly," said the officer.

"What issoc?"

"I want the boy, I tell yer. I got a warrant fer him, for stealin' a wallet o' money."

"Who says he stole it?" demanded Molly, sharply.

"Never mind—that's about the sum an' substance o' the charge ag'in him. So trot him out."

Barefoot Billy was quickly forthcoming.

"Come, youngster," said the officer, "you're wanted."

Molly then hastily put on her old straw bonnet and plaid shawl, and started off behind the officer and Barefoot Billy, toward the city court.

The case was at once examined. The tailor appeared against the boy, told his story, and sat down.

"Were you ever up here before?" asked the judge, mildly, of trembling Barefoot Billy.

"No, sir. I never was in no store before, with no hard-hearted master to charge me with stealin' a thing I don't know anything about, as true's I'm livin'."

"You never have been in court before?"

"No, sir—never."

"First offense," said the judge. "Where's the principal witness in this case—the loser of the wallet?" he continued, looking over some papers.

No answer came to this query.

"Send for him. James Ballard is the name?"

The tailor nodded assent to this question.

It turned out that this gentleman (who had lost the pocket-book), did not desire to press the suit proposed by the master of the shop. But he was summoned and brought in, in a few minutes.

"You lost your money in this man's store, sir?" asked the judge.

"Yes, sir. I missed it, after paying my account there. I went out, leaving the tailor and this lad there, and returned within five minutes. The boy was gone, and I have never seen my wallet since. The lad was then absent from his place two days, I hear—"

"No matter what you heard," remarked the judge, civilly. "Tell only what you know, if you please, Mr. Ballard."

"I remember nothing more than what I have stated. But I came here very reluctantly. I do not make any charge against this lad, and I'm sure I don't know that he knows any more about it than you or I do. I merely relate what occurred when I suddenly missed my wallet."

"How much money was there in it?"

"Nearly a hundred dollars."

"You might have dropped it outside the store, after you left, eh?"

"Yes, sir; possibly."

"Or somebody else might have stolen it?"

"It might be, sir."

"There certainly is no evidence here against this boy, that I can see. Nobody shows that he displayed the money, or spent it, or has had it. It is not found upon him, and he solemnly denies this charge. He has never been up before us before—and I shall discharge him."

"You are at liberty, young man," said his honor, briefly.

And Molly Grabett and Barefoot Billy made their exit out of that court-house, and went home rejoicing.

CHAPTER VII.

BAREFOOT BILLY TRIES ONCE MORE.

Though the boy had been honorably acquitted by the court of the crime alleged against him, yet the stigma rested upon him still, and he was a good deal depressed and mortified by it.

Molly gave him good counsel, in her homely way, and tried to encourage him to make another effort to get employment—first, on his own account, and secondly, because she really was not able to support him in idleness, however well disposed she might be. She was too poor. He must be earning something. And he knew this as well as she did.

"Up an' at it agin, Billy," said Molly, good-naturedly. "Never give up the ship. Stick to it—you' git holt o' somethin, if you try. Heaven helps them as helps themselves."

"I will try, Molly. But it's up-hill work, now, you see," replied the boy, sadly.

"O' course it is; what o' that? Face it, Billy, like a man. You sha'n't want for a home while I have one, if you can't find a place. But try agin, an' never give it up so."

"That I will, Molly—and right off."

Next day (and this was two weeks after his dismissal from the tailor's), Barefoot Billy started off in the morning to hunt up a new place somewhere.

He carried a brave heart under his torn coat, notwithstanding this reverse, and he faced his unpromising prospects with courage.

During the morning he found a shop where a boy was wanted, again; and in he went.

"Do you want to hire a boy, sir?" he asked, with some trepidation.

"Yes," said the proprietor. "How old are you?"

"Fifteen, sir."

"Been in a store yet?"

This was a poser, for Barefoot Billy anticipated the queries that would naturally follow.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Where?" asked the man.

"At Mr. Snip's."

"The tailor—eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do there?"

"Run errands, sir."

"Were you there long?"

"Nigh on to a year, sir."

"Can you read and write, boy?"

"Yes, sir—some."

"What did you leave him for?"

"H—he—didn't want me no longer," replied Barefoot Billy, with a forlorn expression.

"Got any recommendations?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I'll see. Come in to-morrow. I'll inquire about you. Come in again."

And with a sorrowful heart Barefoot Billy went his way. "No chance there," he said to himself. "He'll go to Snip—and that'll be the end o' that business, o' course."

However, he would call on this man next day, if he didn't get a place elsewhere meantime.

The gentleman took the trouble to go over to Snip's whom he knew well, to ask about the boy's character; for he was prepossessed in his favor, and would hire him if he found all right there.

"Barefoot Billy?" exclaimed the tailor, with a good deal of ill-nature; "well, he left me because I sent him away. He's a pauper, a scamp, and a thief as well, I have no doubt."

"You don't say so, Mr. Snip! Well, he doesn't look like one, at any rate."

"You can't tell nothin' from looks, sir. Now I took that boy out o' the gutter. His parents are dead; he's been brought up among the roughs at North End, and turns out a poor creetur, like the rest o' 'em."

"A thief, eh? Well, I don't think I'll be imposed on by him."

Thank you, Snip. Good-day."

Barefoot Billy went around all day, but found no opening except the first one. And next morning he called upon the party whom he had seen the day previous.

"Good-mornin', sir."

"Ah! Well—I don't want you, young man. I've seen Mr. Snip. I don't want you."

"What did my old master tell about me, if you please, sir?"

"Well, it's of no consequence. He said nothing good of you. That's all. I don't want you."

"I hope Mr. Snip will live to see that he has doubly wronged a poor orphan boy, sir," said Barefoot Billy, with singular gravity. "First, in throwing him out of employ when he most needed it, and now in lying about him, as I know he has done to you. Good-mornin', sir."

"The hardened young reprobate!" exclaimed the gentleman, in astonishment at this apparent effrontery. "Anybody'd say, to look at that boy now, that he was a deeply injured youngster, indeed. Oh, the perversity of human nature! I never saw a boy that looked so little like a scamp or a thief, as he does—never. Well, I'm luckily rid of him. He won't rob me."

And still the lad pushed about, but without present success. He could not produce any recommendations from his last place, and nobody would hire him. So he returned, day after day, to Molly's house, without being able to find the chance he sought.

After a while he bought a gross of matches, with the money Molly furnished, and peddled these. Then he tried a few penny papers, but "got stuck" with too many left on hand at night, to find this profitable. Then he helped tend Molly's shop, for Cally was going to school now, regularly. First one poor calling, and then another, but none that netted him his old wages of three dollars a week.

But one day he came home highly elated, for he had found a chance at last.

"What is it, Billy?" asked old Molly, highly pleased with the prospect, whatever it might be.

"I'm goin' to sea, Molly," said the boy, triumphantly. "I've agreed to ship to-morrow. I've told the mate I hadn't no father nor mother—on'y my good friend, Molly Grabett. And he said it was all right, and he'd give me the chance, an' two months' pay for a fit-out, an' we would sail next week. An' I'm a goin', sure."

The boy went on board the ship next day, and every day till she sailed. Molly fixed up all his duds, knit him some socks, and made some stout flannel shirts for him, and got him ready in season. And finally he left the port of Boston in good spirits upon his first voyage as a sailor, with a fair prospect, and poor Molly's earnest blessing.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BURNING SHIP AT SEA.

The name of the vessel upon which Barefoot Billy had shipped was the Meteor, bound to London, and thence for India, a long voyage, but under a good sailing-master, Captain William Evarts, a man of excellent character and disposition. He took a fancy to the boy from the outset, and encouraged him with his pleasant ways and kind treatment. Barefoot Billy had passed a good many years about the docks and among the sailors, and he took to his new calling with zeal and alacrity, making himself a favorite on shipboard at once. And before he had been at sea a month he was not only the pet of the crew and officers, but he

proved one of the jolliest, smartest, and most useful lads they had ever met with.

The Meteor had made slow progress, encountering head winds, and had been out from Boston over two months when she ran up the Irish coast, and was entering the Irish Channel.

The day had been warm, but after nightfall the air was cooler. The clear moon shone down upon the quiet waters, and the ship was under easy sail, when the lookout forward sighted with his glass a bright spot of light far away ahead just upon the edge of the horizon, which he at once reported glibly to the officer of the deck.

"What is it?" asked the mate.

"A strange sight, sir—a vessel on fire, I should say."

"Where away?" quickly inquired the captain, who overheard these words, for he had been lingering on the quarter-deck for an hour.

"Straight ahead, sir," answered the lookout, stepping aft a little. "It bears right for'ard over the bows."

And the boy touched his hat respectfully.

"There is no light-house there," observed Captain Evarts to his helmsman, as he turned his own glass in the direction of the strange light.

The captain ran up the shrouds, glass in hand, and soon made out the object of alarm.

"It is fire," he cried, "and a large vessel, too, evidently."

And he quickly descended to the deck.

"There she comes!" remarked a watchful youngster, in natty blue jacket and broad, turn-down man-o'-war collar. "There's another."

And two signal guns of distress boomed over the silent waters.

"Reply to the signal!" shouted Captain Evarts, promptly, "and stand by to lower away the gig and quarter boat. Bear a-hand now, lads!"

Boom! Boom! came the sullen sound of the signal guns, echoing mournfully over the silent moonlit waters, and bang! bang! went the report of the canon in reply from the deck of the Meteor, whose gallant and humane captain had resolved to reach the doomed vessel as quickly as possible, and at the same time give the periled sufferers notice that succor was at hand.

"Now, Mr. Bracket," he continued, addressing the officer of the deck. "Fling out everything! Put on every inch of canvas you can spread. The wind is light. Make the most of it, and crowd her."

And the men sprang to the work of crowding on all sail with hearty good will.

The stanch ship was now under full sail, and nearing the burning ship, while half a dozen sturdy fellows stood by the davits, ready at the word to lower the two boats as soon as they should come within hailing distance of the fated vessel, the light of the flames of which now spread across the surface of the slightly heaving sea fully two miles.

The watchful youngster spoken of was Barefoot Billy, now a light hand on the Meteor, and a spunky, strong-limbed, venturesome little fellow he proved too. He stood with the rest of the tars at the rail, close to the davits, and was bound to be in the first boat that touched the water. It was rare sport for him, though he was not yet fifteen years old.

"Stand by, lads!" shouted the captain. "Lower away."

And down went the quarter-boat upon an even keel, splash into the water, as six men sprang quickly into her, foremost among the hands being this boy.

"Where are you going, dare-all?" yelled the master of the Meteor, as the boy jumped into the boat and seized the bow oar. "What are you 'bout there, Billy?"

"Goin' to help 'em out, your honor," answered the lad, bravely, and raising his hand to his little tarpaulin hat.

"Give way! Lay to it, lads!" sang out the third mate in the sternsheets of the boat. "It's all right, captain," added the mate, turning to the master. "He's a good'un. He can pull an oar with the best of 'em. Give way now!"

And away shot the quarter boat, jumping through the water at a merry speed, as the six well-trained oarsmen bent manfully to their humane work.

The captain's gig quickly followed, and the long-boat was soon at the Meteor's side. In ten minutes' time the leading boat reached the burning vessel, and the others were shortly alongside.

An indescribable scene of confusion, pain, and death was that on board the fated ship, when the rescuers reached it, in the Meteor's boats.

The quarter-boat arrived alongside, and up went Barefoot Billy nimbly by the main chains like a monkey, and with a bound he topped the rail, and came down upon the heated and simmering deck.

The men who were in the boat with him followed close behind.

These, with others who had meanwhile come up in the other two Meteor's boats, went busily to work.

The periled ship, the Champion, of London, was a large passenger vessel, but fortunately she had on board but about thirty souls, besides the officers and crew, who comprised about as many more. Of the whole about one third perished.

The boats' crews from the Meteor rescued and saved over a score of the sufferers. The quarter-boat, in which Barefoot Billy had planked himself at the outset, when she first left the Meteor, had made two trips already to and from the burning wreck while the boy had remained on board, amid the smoke and fire, searching for the disabled or partially suffocated, dragging them up and out to light and air, and subsequent safety. And upon returning for the third time, on her errand of mercy, it was thought that the burning ship was too far gone for the men to risk further search on board; for the master of the Champion, who worked as hard as any of his men, or the others, repeatedly cautioned all hands to keep clear of the ship now, for she had in the lower hold a magazine of powder which, when reached by the flames, must blow the hull into splinters.

This information had not been understood in the confusion, until everybody had, as was supposed, left the ship; but Barefoot Billy was still on board, and could not be seen anywhere. The young mate who commanded the boat in which the boy had gone, now missed him, on his return from the Meteor, and hearing the warning to keep away from the ship, he inquired:

"Where is the boy?"

"What boy?" answered some one in the other boat.

"Our boy, Barefoot Billy!" shouted the mate.

But nobody had seen the lad for some minutes, and it was known that he had not left the burning ship in either of the boats. The fated vessel was still smoldering in the smoke and flame, and the fire was spreading below decks. *Where was the boy?*

Though well-nigh exhausted and choked, Barefoot Billy was still busy below deck in his labor of love.

CHAPTER IX.

SAVED FROM THE WRECK.

Billy was greatly excited, for, like many boys, he had always taken an interest in running with an engine to a fire.

On board the ill-starred Champion, he had visited every state-room and berth in the cabin, and had already cleared these little rooms of more than a dozen half-unconscious and frightened women and men, whom he had carried, by main strength, or forced up and out to the boats, when he came at last to an apartment where he was struck with the sight of a beautiful little girl, a mere child, who was clinging with frenzied fear to the neck of a man about thirty-five years of age, or more, whom the fair creature was endeavoring to raise or awaken.

"Come, miss," shouted Barefoot Billy, sharply; "you must get out of this! And right lively, too—come on!"

And lifting the man up in his stout arms, he sang out lustily: "Come, sir; you've no time to lay here—sick or well. You'll be burned alive! Say—up, now!"

The little girl shrieked:

"Pray don't hurt him! Pray don't!"

"What's the matter with him? Is he dead?" inquired the boy, hurriedly, and gazing into the man's pallid face.

"No—no. He's sick and very weak. Poor papa!"

"I should say so," replied the boy. "But he sha'n't die here, at all events. Up, man! Now we'll go it," continued the boy, bravely. And he tugged away, lifted him, blew the smoke from his own parched mouth and lungs, drew the almost inanimate body of the prostrated man out on deck, and got him to the side of the ship's stern, out of reach of the flames—and into one of the boats—which ventured under the stern to receive him.

"Keep off!" screamed the captain of the doomed vessel, fiercely; at this moment ordering his own boat away in haste. "Keep away, men. She must soon blow up! Keep off, I tell you!"

But Barefoot Billy was still on board, with the little girl. The man thus saved was her father. She had clung to him to the last moment, and refused to leave his berth until he went. He was very ill, and had been so for two weeks, and did not realize either his peril or the condition of things at all. His sweet little daughter, about nine years old, stuck by him, however, for she was a pet, and had little real conception of their fearful jeopardy, at the moment when Barefoot Billy burst open their state-room door. When her father was lifted down into the boat, she clasped her tiny white hands with delirious joy, and sank down by the rail, at the boy's feet, exhausted with excitement, and the dense cloud of smoke that overwhelmed them all for an instant.

At the sharp summons of the nervous captain of the Champion,

the men in the boat shoved off, and pulled for the Meteor with the sick man, who was dressed in a costly robe of French flannel, and who they supposed must be, from his appearance, some dignitary, who was especially worth saving.

Barefoot Billy turned, saw the little girl's white dress in the moonlight near him, and then, for the first time heard the terrible warning words of the loud-voiced captain of the Champion:

"Keep off! get away! the ship must soon blow up!"

"Can you swim, miss?" asked Barefoot Billy, quickly, seeing the boats no where near them.

"No," said the little girl, "I can't. Can you?"

"Yes, indeed. We must leave this spot, lively, now."

"I'm most choked; but poor dear father is safe!"

"And you shall be saved too, Blossom!" said the boy.

"How? Where's the boat?"

"Gone! And the ship is in danger of blowing to pieces!"

"How?" asked the child.

"The powder magazine hasn't been reached by the fire, yet," replied Barefoot Billy; "but it may ignite in a moment. Come, courage, now, young lady! I can swim like a dolphin. I'm strong, too. I can carry you. Are you afraid?"

"Of what—the powder?"

"No! I'm afraid of that," said the boy, frankly. "I mean are you afraid of the water? Will you jump overboard with me? I'll save you—I'll hold you up! Come on! The boats will catch us in a minute. Dare you?"

"Yes—yes!" said the little girl, dubiously.

"Oling to me, then. What's your name, little one?"

"Tot—Tot!" said the child, innocently.

"Come on, then, Tot!" shouted Barefoot Billy encouragingly, and drawing the confused child further away from the stifling smoke to the taffrail.

"Now courage, little one," he said. "Hang on to me. I won't desert you. The boats 'll save us. You'll soon join your father again. Now we go—don't be scared!"

And as she clutched his shoulder Barefoot Billy placed his strong arm around the slender waist of the trusting little girl, and together they leaped from the burning ship into the sea!

The careful mate in the quarter boat, himself a young man, but some years older than Barefoot Billy, had taken a strong liking to the brave boy, and he was on the lookout in the Meteor's boat, hoping to see the lad turn up, somewhere, before the crash should occur, which all hands now looked for at any moment. He caught a glimpse of the little girl's white dress for an instant, and then he saw the figure of the boy, as the trustful twain plunged into the water.

"There he is! There's Barefoot Billy!" screamed the sailor to his men, who lay on their oars, to winward of the doomed ship.

"Give way, now, lads! Bend to it, all together! Now, again! Steady, so. Here we are, Barefoot Billy! Brave boy! hold on," he yelled to the struggling little fellow, who saw the boat approaching, and could hear the ringing, cheerful voice of his shipmate and friend, Harry Hoppin; and, though exhausted with the toil and half suffocation to which he had been for nearly an hour exposed, he still spoke encouragingly to the little girl, who had both her arms twined about his neck, for she was thoroughly frightened now, and nearly choked her young friend.

But Barefoot Billy got her round behind him and told her to "hang on, Tot! That's right!" And he struck out boldly away from the vicinity of the burning ship, when he heard the third mate's voice, and saw, faintly, the white splash of foam that streamed up from the coming boat's cutwater, as the boys laid flat to their oars, and sent her spinning over the waves to the rescue.

"Hold hard!" screamed Harry Hoppin to his young shipmate, "Hang on, brave boy! we're comin'!"

And then to the men he shouted—"Once more, lads, and all together—lively! There's a little girl hanging to him. I can see her white frock. Give way—she's goin' under! No; he's got her again! Quick, now, for Heaven's sake; lay to it!"

And they did lay to it with a will.

"Steady, so. Here we are!" and reaching the spot where Barefoot Billy was supporting the now fainting girl. Harry and his men quickly grasped the periled pair and drew them into his boat and pulled away for the Meteor, where rescuers and rescued were received on board with great joy by good Captain Evarts, his crew, and passengers. Amid the congratulations and busy inquiries that succeeded, the powder in the hold of the Champion was reached by the fire. A terrific explosion soon followed, rending the air like a sharp peal of thunder, and shattering the burning hull and spars and rigging into shreds in less time than it has taken to record the result.

The sufferers were provided for on board the Meteor as comfortably as possible. The ship was turned upon her course again toward London, and all went on well during the remainder of Barefoot Billy's first voyage at sea.

The Champion had sailed from Boston a week before the Meteor, and the sick man (whose life and that of his little daughter Barefoot Billy had so providentially been the instrument of saving), was on his way to Europe for his health. He was still quite ill, and had been in bed on board the Meteor an hour when Barefoot Billy reached the ship.

CHAPTER X.

BAREFOOT BILLY IS SURPRISED.

Billy turned in, after his arduous adventure, and the attention of the Meteor's passengers was given to the unfortunate people who had so suddenly been added to their companionship. The sick man whom Barefoot Billy had rescued from the burning ship was Mr. Ballard, of Boston, a prosperous merchant. He had been taken quite sick soon after his departure. His illness was of such a character as to oblige him to take opium freely for relief.

He was in a stupor when the alarm of fire was given, and his daughter could not arouse him. But for the fortunate coming, and subsequent persistent efforts of Barefoot Billy, both he and his child would have perished.

When Mr. Ballard came to consciousness on board the Meteor, little Tot was overjoyed, and she took the first opportunity to tell her father everything concerning their narrow escape.

Next morning, Mr. Ballard having slept off the effects of the opium, sent for his daughter, who again recounted to him the perils they had passed through, and again renewed her childish praise of the bravery of little Barefoot Billy.

"And you tell me, pet, that he's a boy?" exclaimed the grateful and surprised father.

"Yes, papa, only a little fellow, though bigger than me, and as brave and as strong as a lion. He took you out, amid the dreadful smoke, when you couldn't speak, and carried you up on the deck, away from the fire, just like a stout man would, and saved you, too; and I'm so glad, papa."

"Who is this young hero, darling?"

"I don't know, papa. He caught me after he had saved you, and jumped over into the water with me, and held me up, and told me not to be afraid, and he would save me; and he swam, and I couldn't, you know, and I was afraid, for the salt water got into my mouth and choked me, but he kept on saying 'hold on, Tot,' and 'it's all right now, Tot,' and I got right on his back, and then he swam again, and then caught one of the Meteor's boats, and they dragged us in, and we got on board the ship here all nicely. And he's a brave, good boy, isn't he, papa?"

"Yes, indeed, he is," replied the father, earnestly; "and he shall be well rewarded, too. Where is he now?"

"I don't know, papa. I haven't seen him since he drew me up from the boat on board here. I want to see him, though."

Barefoot Billy was sent for an hour or two afterward, and was highly commended by the thankful father, who remembered to have seen the lad before.

The Meteor proceeded on her voyage, and arrived in the Thames without further incident. The passengers went ashore, and Mr. Ballard and his daughter took a very kindly leave of Barefoot Billy, and the third mate, Billy's friend, Harry Hoppin.

The next day, when all the sailors had been given liberty to go to the city for a while, Captain Evarts detained Barefoot Billy on board.

"I have something to say to you, youngster," observed the master of the Meteor, mysteriously. "Wait; I will speak with you shortly alone. Come to the cabin, sir."

The boy promptly obeyed this order, though he was not a little perplexed at the changed manner of the usually pleasant captain.

When Barefoot Billy entered the cabin, he found the captain sitting gravely at his little table, with some papers before him. The boy stood, tarpaulin hat in hand, for a moment, greatly astonished at the stern manner of his superior, who said, stiffly:

"Now, youngster, how long have you been on board my ship?"

"Goin' on three months, cap'n," replied Barefoot Billy, civilly.

"Three months? Yes, over two months."

"Yer, sir, over two and a half."

"Ay. Well, you've come to be something of a sailor, boy."

"I've tried to learn, sir, and always meant to do my duty as well as I could."

"And you have succeeded famously, boy. Do you know what you've done in the late matter of the burning ship, youngster?"

"Nothin' wrong, I hope, cap'n," said Barefoot Billy, quickly.

"You've done what I haven't accomplished, yet, and I've followed the sea for nearly twenty years, boy!"

"What's that?" queried Barefoot Billy, astonished again.

"Made your fortune, young Hotspur," said Captain Evarts, with the old pleasant smile. "Made your fortune, Billy, through your bravery and daring conduct. Here! This is what Mr. Ballard sends you from his hotel this morning for having saved his life and that of his little girl."

And Barefoot Billy was amazed to behold in the captain's hands a cash order upon the Bank of England "for the benefit of the brave boy, Billy Robson, of the ship Meteor," for two hundred pounds sterling—a thousand dollars.

This announcement almost took the lad's breath away for the moment. Ordinarily Barefoot Billy was not easily startled, but when this matter was kindly explained to him by Captain Evarts, he really thought he had made a fortune, for he had never seen so much money before in the whole course of his life.

"Thank you, cap'n," began Barefoot Billy.

"Oh, you needn't thank me. I had nothing to do with it, Billy. You did it all yourself. I should scarcely have allowed you to go to the burning vessel in Hoppin's boat, hadn't you got away before I knew you were there?"

"But it all come round right, cap'n."

"So it did, thank Heaven! You acted like a brave, good young sailor, and this is your reward. I will collect this draft and take care of it for you. Now you can go ashore and find the boys."

CHAPTER XI.

MR. SNIP CALLS AT MOLLY'S SHOP.

Good Dame Grabett was sitting in her little back room one evening three days after Billy left, when the shop-bell rang, and Molly went to answer the summons.

The dame's mind was in a pleasant frame at this moment, but when she reached the shop and saw the person she most thoroughly despised, the old irate spirit of her former days took swift possession of her as she sharply muttered:

"Well, sir, what do you want, I'd like to know?"

"You recollect me, ma'am," said her visitor, mildly.

"Yes; your face ain't easily forgot. I never saw it but once, an' hoped I shouldn't see it ag'in. You're Snip, the lying tailor."

"Well, mum, I am Mr. Snip. Where's Barefoot Billy? I want him."

"An' you'll have to want him then. He ain't here. You had him once to his sorrow, Master Snip. You won't have him ag'in in a hurry, mind that now."

"Oh, he's a good boy, is Barefoot Billy," continued his late master, obsequiously. "He's a very good lad—"

"When did you find that out? Didn't you send the poor lad to the police court, and charge him with stealing, and tell everybody that wanted to employ him afterward that he was a thief? Come, Master Snip, didn't you?"

"I'm very sorry, ma'am, very, for what happened then, I assure you," said Snip, humbly.

"Well, you ought to be. An' honest boy never lived; but you abused him, and badgered him, and drove him out of the country. An' he's gone, an' I'm glad of it, out o' your way where you can't catch him if you do want him," continued Molly, stoutly.

"Gone away? Why, I've been looking for him for a week. And the policeman told me he was here with you this morning."

"Well, he ain't here. He's gone to sea."

"To sea! When?"

"Three days ago."

"Well, I'm sorry, ma'am, for I wanted Barefoot Billy to come back to the shop. I was mistaken about the lost wallet. It has been found all safe."

"Found!" exclaimed, Molly, delighted, and greatly mollified with this glad news.

"Yes, mum."

"Where?"

"Why, you see, when Barefoot Billy hurried away so from the store that night his mother died, the gentleman who missed it just paid his bill. The wallet lay on the counter, and Barefoot Billy, in his haste to get home, put up on the shelf the heavy piece of cloth which my customer was looking at, and rolled the pocket-book up in it without noticing it. The cloth wasn't disturbed, afterward, for several days; when a week ago, we took it down to show to another patron, out rolled Mr. Ballard's missing wallet all safe and sound!"

Kind-hearted Molly was overjoyed at this fortunate discovery, but Barefoot Billy was then far away at sea, and she couldn't tell him the glad news.

"I come after him, you see, as soon as I could find the place where I learned he was stopping. But it's all right. Mr. Ballard has got his money, and he has gone away, too, to Europe, for his health. He sailed in the ship Champion only a few days ago. What vessel did Barefoot Billy go in, ma'am?"

"The Meteor," said Molly, which was as nearly as she could recollect the name of Barefoot Billy's ship.

"The Meteor, eh? Well, I hope Mr. Ballard will meet him," said the tailor, dryly; "and tell the boy all about the finding of the pocket-book. I'm sorry he's gone, though. I would have taken him back, and increased his wages. I was too hasty. I will tell him so, if I ever see him again. How long will he be gone, mum?"

"I don't know. Two years, mayhap. He's gone to London and to Ingy afterward," responded Molly.

"Mr. Ballard's gone to London too," said Snip, thoughtfully.

"I hope, as I said before, they'll chance to meet, mum, for he didn't think the boy knew anything of the missing wallet, and always said so."

"Well, it can't be helped."

"No, mum. It was an unfortunate occurrence. It looked bad, but I was wrong. I wish the boy was here. I'd make it all up to him."

And, with this tardy but welcome explanation and apology, Mr. Snip retired from Molly's little shop.

"There ain't much chance, as I can see," murmured Molly, as she returned to Cally and her Bible, "for Billy to run across this Mr. Ballard."

Little, indeed, did she imagine that within two months from that night, the barefoot boy she loved had come upon the loser of the wallet, and saved his life and his child's, for this was the same gentleman who had lost the pocket-book to whom it had been returned (as Snip stated) a day or two before he left Boston. But Barefoot Billy did not remember his face, though Mr. Ballard recollected him, and subsequently explained to Barefoot Billy all about the finding of his money to our hero's heartfelt gratification.

But it was not till some days after this, that he learned, through Captain Evarts, of the [substantial regard which the merchant entertained for him.

He went ashore—had a good time with his mates in London—comported himself acceptably—and returned seasonably to duty on board the Meteor, which soon afterward started for Calcutta.

Before the ship sailed from London, the captain having obtained Barefoot Billy's thousand dollars from the bank, asked the boy what he intended to do with it.

Barefoot Billy saw the shining gold—two hundred guineas—and knew it was his—all his! But what could he do with this pile of money? Suddenly he thought of good old Molly Grabett, and his darling little sister Cally, and turning to Captain Evarts, he said:

"Send it home to Molly, captain, if you please."

"Molly? Who is she?" asked the captain.

"The best-hearted old woman in Boston, captain. The only friend I ever had, till I saw you, after my poor mother died. She is takin' care of my dear little sister, Cally, and she isn't over-burdened with money, as I know full well. It will be a God-send to Molly, that's a fact," said the boy, with glistening eyes, as he thought what a lift it would be to his hardworking old friend at home.

"Then Cally wants an education, you see, cap'n—and clo'es—good clo'es, to go to church and to school in; an' Molly can't afford to get 'em for her. Send it to Molly, cap'n."

"So be it, Billy, if you say so. But let me tell you what I think you'd better do with it," replied Captain Evarts, advisedly.

"Ain't that best, captain?"

"Well, Billy, we're going from London to India on a trading voyage. You don't know anything about this, but I can invest your money for you so that you can take out a certain kind of goods to Calcutta, upon which you can there realize—or I can, for you—a very handsome profit. Then, with the proceeds, you can buy goods there, which, on the home voyage, when we return to America, next year, you can double this money again."

This idea pleased Barefoot Billy vastly.

"Now I advise you to send say a fourth part of your money to your friend Molly, which will serve her purposes till you get back, I judge, and put the rest in this venture I have described."

And thus the matter was settled so far as Barefoot Billy's new "fortune" was concerned.

CHAPTER XII.

A LETTER FROM THE BOY.

Molly Grabett was in her little shop one morning, six months after Barefoot Billy sailed, rubbing the dust off the apples and oranges, and making things tidy and presentable—for she kept a very neat little place, latterly—when the penny postman entered, with a queer-looking letter, with strange, foreign postage stamps on the cover, addressed in a handwriting she had never seen before, to "Miss, or Mrs. Molly Grabett; Shop, Cross Lane, Boston, U. S. A."

"Isn't this for you?" inquired the postman, presenting the letter to the woman.

Molly looked it over, couldn't think of anybody in the old country, whence she came a quarter of a century previously, who would be likely to write her, for she had heard from no one there for years—when she read the postmark, "London."

"Ah, yes; I reck'n it's all right. It's from Billy! Though this ain't his writin', by no means."

She opened it, found it to contain a handsomely engraved picture (as she at first supposed the contents to be), but afterward found it was a sight draft for two hundred and fifty dollars, and read the following gratifying epistle from the long absent boy.

It was very badly spelled, and the writing was none of the best, to be sure; but it was clear to the good old dame, who picked it out slowly, and communicated it all to Cally, as follows:

"LONDON, THE 2, THE JUN.

"DEER GUD MOLY.

"I bin lukey nuf sence i cum to cee. had fust rate time ony got hom sick som But got well quick, cos orl The bois larft wen i ced i was. I didnt Kare tho much, an i puncht won ov thar heds But nun tu hurt—ony tu keepe him frum plagin me agin, an had jolly times at a bully big fire in the oshun ware thar was lotts ov wartur butt they couldnt poot er out, an i went to the fire an thay hadunt no Eenjines nor hoes but it was a ship Burnin up. and i gerked a Ole feller out, an poosht im inter a bote en saiv his lif he sais. It wos mister ballord the Man at lose his wollit in ole snips Merschant taolers shopp ware i usta keap, an i didnt steel it, for he tole me he found it orl rite arter i came to cea. an mister ballord giv me a lot ov muncy cos i pusht him overborde an his little gal two, nott so big as cally is, an I eend you in this a papper at will giv yu tu hunder an fifty dollers out ov it, an i send lot of Kises an my luv tu yu an cally, an so no more from your lavi bairfut billy Robsan."

"Heaven bless the boy!" said Molly, devoutly, when she had finished this letter, which she could appreciate so well. "Heaven bless and prosper him, always."

Just before the Meteor sailed for Calcutta and the East, Barefoot Billy fixed himself up in a clean suit, and went over to the hotel, where he knew Mr. Ballard and "Tot" were tarrying, to thank his munificent benefactor and take leave of him.

The rescued merchant was very complimentary to the lad, and the little girl permitted the pretty sailor boy, who had saved her life, to kiss her tiny hand, as she bade her preserver adieu.

The parting was a tender one—though they were comparative strangers.

The Meteor reached Calcutta after a good passage. The venture of Barefoot Billy turned out finely, and Captain Evarts invested the proceeds in goods for the Boston market, such as he knew would sell to advantage. The captain had been absent from America nearly a year, when he was ready once more to set sail from India "homeward bound." His cargo was a good one, his ship was in excellent trim, and he left port with a fair wind and fine prospects. His freight was fully insured.

And thus the Meteor was headed westward once more. Captain Evarts hoping to reach Boston in four or five months from the time he left Calcutta.

The Meteor had been out from Calcutta some weeks, and Captain Evarts had taken a north-westerly course, and was passing up south of the coast of Morocco, not having met a vessel of any kind for a week, when one afternoon a stranger was sighted by the lookout, in the fore-top, who announced to the deck-officer: "Sail, ho!"

The vessel proved to be a pirate. After a lively chase, the Meteor escaped, and was beached by the chief mate on an island east of the harbor of Funchal.

The captain had been mortally wounded in the fight with the pirate.

The cargo of the Meteor was mostly of such a character that it was removed without injury. But it was a considerable time before the ship could be got ready for sea again in that country. She was finally taken to Funchal, the chief port in the island, and eventually sent to Boston.

Meanwhile, Barefoot Billy remained at Funchal with Captain Evarts, unceasing in his attentions to him.

The ship sailed just before the captain's death. She had on board a considerable amount of specie belonging to the owners, which the pirates sought to gain, but which the master, through the desperate plan he adopted of running her ashore, saved from capture.

Six months had passed since the night when the Meteor was beached, during which period the captain lingered on, with but small prospect of ever permanently recovering his health. The beautiful climate of Madeira aided materially to lengthen his days, but he failed gradually, and saw that his hour of dissolution was approaching. Barefoot Billy had been very zealous in his attentions to Captain Evarts, who finally told his youthful attendant that he could not hold out much longer.

"My surgeons have not deceived me, Billy," he said, mournfully. "My hours are numbered. I would have lived, if it had been God's will, but I am resigned. I have ever striven to deal justly with all men, and I leave this world of turmoil with no regrets for the past. You will return to Boston; communicate directly with our owners, and tell them all that they should know of our ill-fortune here, which I might not have explained by writing already. Among the ship's papers you will find the insurance policies—for your goods among the rest. You have done well pecuniarily, and I am glad of that. Your wages will all be paid you to the day of your arrival home. And so, Heaven bless you and yours, my boy! And may you never know the pains I have suffered here, or be assailed with this bad luck I have experienced."

Two days afterward, Barefoot Billy received the captain's final blessing, and saw him breathe his last. With tearful emotion he bade him farewell, and felt that he had dutifully closed the eyes of the best known friend he had that day on earth.

During this long and weary sickness of the captain, the physicians had advised the free use of the fine wines of Madeira, as stimulants for the invalid, who had always been a moderate drinker of liquors—as most ship-masters in those days were. The presence of this beverage continually before him was, unfortunately, not disagreeable to Barefoot Billy. He really loved the taste and odor of alcoholic liquors, and always had, alas! though he had not indulged to excess as yet.

He had unluckily inherited from his father this dreadful taste, but he had thus far controlled his appetite; but, during his six months' stay at Madeira, in the midst of the every-day use of wine by the captain, the appetite increased, and the boy fed it.

He was unconscious of the power this insidious enemy was gaining over him. He could not help his natural love for it, and he was so placed, for the time, that he gratified his taste, without consideration as to the future.

Soon after the captain's burial, Barefoot Billy sailed for London from Madeira, intending thence to return to the city of his birth at the first opportunity.

CHAPTER XIII.

BAREFOOT BILLY ASTONISHES MR. SNIP.

Billy tarried in England two months. He had plenty of ready money and ample leisure to enjoy life there, but he yearned for home, and longed to see his darling sister Cally, and good old Molly Grabett, and Mr. Ballard, whom he remembered so well.

He had not communicated with his friends in Boston since he sent his first letter, but at last he was ready to leave London; and having resolved not to follow the sea, after Captain Evarts' death, he sailed as passenger in a packet for New York. He reached the United States in safety two years from the time he left Boston in the Meteor.

At New York he obtained a complete shore-fit of clothes, and a week after his arrival there he repaired to Boston in excellent health.

But Barefoot Billy had greatly changed in personal appearance. He had grown tall and stout in two years. His countenance was bronzed from exposure, and in his fashionable New York attire, no one could have recognized the former frowzy-haired, ill-dressed, ragged "Barefoot Billy," who used to be so well-known around the docks at the North End of Boston.

Indeed, he was now a very presentable young man—modest in address, quiet in his manners, and vastly improved in every way.

He was eighteen years old only. He looked to be twenty, when he reached Boston—where nobody looked for him, and where not a single individual recognized him for some time after his arrival there.

This amused him vastly. Everybody seemed so polite and deferential to him as he passed about among the people, and was continually addressed as "Mr. Robson," in a friendly or obsequious manner, as the circumstances seemed to require.

Yet he was the same unassuming, good-hearted, generous, loving "Billy" that he had ever been. Because he now wore a clean white shirt, and a suit of broadcloth, he did not deem himself any better than he ever had been. He was only changed in appearance. That was all.

"What a difference it makes," he said, mentally, "nevertheless. A black coat, French boots, a stovepipe hat, and kid gloves wonderfully change one's figure. But has Molly changed? Cally is two years older, but she is the same sweet girl she always was, I'm sure. I so long to embrace these good friends, and be the boy again."

The merchandise which Captain Evarts purchased for Barefoot Billy's account in Calcutta, with the proceeds of the boy's venture from London, reached Boston at a fortunate time, and had been disposed of to excellent advantage by the consignees some months before he arrived home. And there stood to the young man's credit in the hands of the owners of the ship the goodly sum of twenty-eight hundred and fifty dollars—which had been realized for his seven hundred and fifty dollars, originally invested for him by Captain Evarts.

His two years' wages amounted to two hundred dollars more, and the captain had given him three hundred dollars for his services, extra, at Madeira. Of these latter sums, he had expended only about three hundred, in all, upon himself. So that on reaching Boston he had over three thousand dollars in cash after his long and adventurous voyage.

Upon arriving in Boston he was driven at once to a good hotel, where he established himself in comfortable quarters—dined, enjoyed his wine, and then concluded to go down to Molly's little shop, and surprise the friends whom he so loved, and who had begun to talk of his return.

The weather was cool, and our hero needed an overcoat. The happy idea all at once popped into his head that he would purchase one, and off he went upon his impulse, to the merchant-tailor's shop where he was formerly employed—Mr. Snip's.

Entering the old store, he found his late master there, unchanged in manner and appearance, and he expressed his desire to see some cloth for a surtout.

The goods were taken from the shelves, and the young gentleman selected a heavy piece of beaver, very similar to that which, as far as Billy could recollect, was very like the roll in which Mr. Ballard's wallet had been concealed.

"Make me a good fit, sir, if you please," said the young man, whom Snip did not recognize at all. "I am recommended to you through my former acquaintance with Mr. Ballard—one of your old customers, I believe."

"Mr. Ballard!" said Snip, pleasantly. "Oh, yes—he was a good customer of mine, and good pay, too. But not of late. It's two years, now, since Mr. Ballard has been inside this store. I don't know what could have made him withdraw his patronage, I am sure—unless—"

"He has been in Europe, I think," said Billy, who didn't care to hear about the wallet business again, while he thought he could guess the reason why Mr. Ballard had selected another tailor.

"Yes," said the storekeeper. "He was absent a year abroad; but he has never been here since he went to London."

Billy—barefooted no more—drew a one hundred dollar note from his purse to pay for the garment.

Snip had to send it out to be broken, for he hadn't money enough to change it. And, besides, as this gentlemanly looking fellow was a total stranger to him, he wasn't sure that the note was a good one.

"The boy'll be back in a moment, sir. Sit down."

"Never mind," said Billy, in an off-hand way. "When will the overcoat be finished?"

"On Saturday, sir—without fail."

"All right. I am stopping at the Tremont House. Send up the change and the coat together to my apartments on Saturday."

And the stranger moved to the door.

"What name, sir, if you please?" said Snip, bowing.

"Billy Robson. Good-day, Mr. Snip."

CHAPTER XIV.

MOLLY'S NEW PATRON.

Cally Robson was now past fourteen, and a nice young lady she had grown to be. Molly was very fond of her, for she had taught her, and caused her to be educated. She clothed her neatly, and trained her "in the way of the Lord," in her humble way.

"I wish Billy would come, Molly," she said, on the evening that the young man left Snip in his shop door-way so astounded. "I long to greet him, and I want him to be with us when we

erect the little marble monument, just finished, which we have got for mother's and father's grave."

"I should be glad to have him here, then, I'm sure, Cally; but there's no tellin' when he'll be back. Life's so unartin. Think of the death of his poor cap'n—so strange! You remember we read of the wreck, and the end of that accident, a month ago, in the newspapers."

Here the shop-bell rang, and Molly went in to answer it, as usual.

A tall young man stood there near the counter.

"Is this Cross street, ma'am?" he asked, in a voice Molly never heard before.

"Yes, sir."

"Who keeps this shop?"

"I do, sir."

"What name?"

"Grabett, sir."

"Ah, yes; Molly Grabett," continued the stranger, civilly.

"Well, it's to be sold, I hear."

"What is?"

"This shop and contents."

"Not as I know of," said Molly, earnestly.

"Well, I think I'm right," continued the young man. "It's to be sold at once, and the woman who owns it is to go elsewhere, with a little girl she had charge of some time, called Cally Robson, if I'm correct."

"What do you mean, young man? I hain't heerd o' none o' this. I'm Molly Grabett, an' I own this shop, an' I reck'n I shall be 'lowed to have somethin' to say about this business, if I know myself, and I think I do. Come, now, sir!"

"You're Molly, eh? Well, you've got such a young girl here, then?"

"Yes, an' I cal'late I'll keep her here, too," replied the woman, tartly.

"I would like to see the young lady, ma'am. I'm certain, though, that you'll both have to quit this place immediately. Will you call Miss Cally, ma'am?"

"Cally! Cally!" shouted Molly, briskly; "come here!"

"Never mind, Molly," said the stranger. "I can just as well go in and see her in the back room."

And he passed by the astonished Molly, who followed his footsteps closely into the snug back sitting-room, which was well-lighted, and where Cally had just risen from reading to answer Molly's summons.

"Cally!" said the stranger, advancing.

"Billy, dear Billy!—oh! how glad I am to see you!" shouted the girl, instantly; and brother and sister were quickly locked in each other's arms, in a long, hearty embrace.

Turning to Molly, then, he took his old friend's hand, kissed her rough cheek, and said:

"Why, Molly, don't you know poor Barefoot Billy?"

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed Molly, reverently. "I never, never, never!" and she hugged the boy for joy. "Well, Billy Robson, of all things, where did you come from, in all that fancy toggery? Know you? Of course I didn't," murmured the woman.

"I knew brother Billy the minute I saw him, Molly," said Cally, triumphantly; "the very minute he came in! And I'm so glad he's come! And what a great boy he is! isn't he, Molly? And dressed like a handsome young gentleman, too! And he's looking splendid, I think—don't you, Molly?"

The two ladies looked at him. Cally kissed her brother again and again in her childish excitement, and the trio were very happy that night, as the reader may well imagine.

"Know you?" continued Molly, after a little. "How should I, with your tale about selling out this shop? I thought you was a crazy man."

"But that is all just so, Molly, as I stated it. This shop must be sold, and you and Cally must go into better quarters. I'm rich, old lady! I can't live here, you know," said Billy, looking round the low room. And I sha'n't live anywhere but with you and my darling sister Cally, of course."

"Indeed!" said Molly. "So you're on your high horse all at once, Billy!"

"No, Molly, not that. But I've got plenty of money for us all now, and we will have comfortable and respectable quarters, out of this neighborhood, forthwith. I don't want to come back here, in view of old associations, and I can't be away from Cally and you. But we'll talk it all over to-morrow. To-night I am too happy to see you both to enter into any business calculations in detail. Still, Molly, the shop and contents will be sold at once, as I told you."

The friends then went into a brief narration of all that had occurred to each, in the past two years, since the separation; and then they all sat down to a nice little family supper, which Molly

had busied herself in preparing, while Billy and Cally talked over their glad re-union.

"Now, Billy, it's all ready," said Molly; "and we'll have a cup o' tea together after the old style."

They sat down at the little oval table, which was neatly laid and garnished with a dish of cup-cakes and hot biscuits which Molly knew Billy was, in the old days, so glad to get; and Molly invoked a blessing over the viands, in the course of which she thanked Heaven so earnestly for the wanderer's safe return that Billy was quite melted, and joined with darling Cally in the sympathetic "Amen" as naturally and as heartily as if he had been one of the little family uninterruptedly all his days.

After the first outgushing ebullitions of joy had subsided, both the sister and Molly evinced a restraint which attracted the boy's notice, and which disturbed him as he finally rose to leave his friends for the night.

"And you're very glad to see me, Cally?" said Billy, kindly. "I'm sure I'm quite as happy to find you and good Molly looking so well. And now I must bid you good-night. I shall come down again to-morrow, just as soon as I have seen my employers, the owners of the Meteor, who have got my money laid by for me—and perhaps I shall call upon Mr. Ballard, too. But I'll be round again before noon. Good-night, baby! Good-night, Molly!"

And, as he was about to embrace his sister, he observed that her eyes were filled with tears. He pressed her to his heart, and said:

"What is it, darling?"

"Oh, Billy!" whispered Cally, weeping on his shoulder, "I am very happy you've come home! But, Billy—brother—don't forget our dear dead mother's words; and, Billy—pray, don't ever drink another glass of wine!"

Both she and Molly had detected in his breath the odor of the old Madeira he had drunk at dinner, and this was what so depressed them after the first joyful greeting was over.

"It's nothing, darling—nothing. I will not offend you so again," said the boy, tenderly.

And, kissing her fondly, Billy bade them good-night again, and went to his hotel.

CHAPTER XV.

"LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION."

Billy was mortified at being even thus softly chided by his sister at their first meeting after a two years' separation.

"And yet," he said to himself, when he got back to his quarters, "it was very kind of Cally, and well intended, I'm certain. And it was *just*, too! But then she's a gentle little creature, and has a horror of liquor, I know. Yet she's over-anxious. I know what I can bear—I know when to take a glass of wine, surely—and when to stop."

Still, this appeal rung in his ears all that night—"Don't forget our dear dead mother's words, Billy; and pray don't ever drink another glass of wine."

This sisterly admonition came fresh from his loving Cally's heart, and Billy knew it. And he knew as well how she had discovered he had been drinking that day.

The caution set the boy to thinking; but he went to sleep, and the matter passed from his mind. He concluded he would be more careful as to being discovered in a similar manner—but this was all, at present.

Next day he spent the forenoon with the owners of the Meteor, who welcomed the boy very gladly, for they knew he had attended their old servant, Captain Evarts, faithfully in his trying illness, and the boy explained all the details with which the captain had intrusted him before his death.

He found the sum to his credit in their hands was larger than he had expected. They gave him a bank check for the twenty-eight hundred and fifty dollars, with many compliments, and the expression of the hope he would continue in their service on board some other ship of their line. But Billy informed them respectfully that his sea days were over.

About three o'clock he went to the store of Mr. Ballard to offer his respects, and inquire after the health of his little daughter, "Tot."

Mr. Ballard was just leaving his store for dinner when the young gentleman entered, clad in his new dress suit, and approaching, presented Mr. B. his hand.

"You remember me, of course, sir," said Billy; "I am very glad to see you, Mr. Ballard."

"I see so many faces, really, young man—I forget. Where have we met before?"

"Is it possible, sir. You haven't changed much. I knew you directly. Well, sir, the first time we met was not a pleasant occasion to you, I remember, though perhaps a lucky one. It was in the cabin of the burning *Champion* at sea! I'm BAREFOOT BILLY, the sailor boy, of the Meteor, Mr. Ballard."

The good merchant quickly and heartily embraced the handsome young man, and offered a hundred apologies.

"Upon my word, Master Robson," he said; "I did not suspect who you were. You are changed, indeed, in your appearance. I am rejoiced to see you, Billy, home again—safe and sound; and to know, as I do, that your voyage has turned out so well at last, for I have often inquired about you since I returned from Europe through the owners of the Meteor, whom I am well acquainted with."

"Thank you, Mr. Ballard, for the interest you have taken in me. And now, allow me to ask how is Miss 'Tot,' your sweet daughter, sir? I hope she is well."

"Very well, and will be delighted to welcome you home, as I am. Come! You haven't dined to-day?"

"I am now on my way to my hotel, sir," replied Billy. "I deemed it but dutiful to call on you at once, and pay my respects, and leave with you my regards for your daughter."

"Oh, yes, but I must insist that you accompany me home to dinner, where you can present your compliments in person to Tot, who will be very glad to see you, assuredly. She has frequently spoken of her gallant preserver. Come. The carriage waits."

And thus it occurred that Barefoot Billy was taken into Mr. Ballard's carriage, then standing at the door, and thence to his handsome house on W— street, where he met Tot, who didn't remember the handsome young gentleman at all—until affairs were explained—when *she* too was vastly surprised at the change in Billy's appearance, and made herself very agreeable, though she was only a dozen years old.

Billy dined with Mr. Ballard—who *wined* him sumptuously, as was the habit in society in those days, and the boy got very talkative and very "mellow" through this means before he got through with the well-intentioned but (to him) unfortunate "style" of good Mr. Ballard's hospitality.

How much he drank Billy didn't know. He only knew that when he rose from the table he had sat there three hours talking and drinking; that he had enjoyed a capital dinner, that it was almost dark when the carriage took him from Mr. Ballard's residence to his hotel, that Miss Tot was a charming-looking young girl, that her father was a prince in his way, that he went back to his room, threw himself upon the outside of his bed, without undressing, and slept there soundly till after sunrise the next morning, awaking with a wretched headache, and a thirst that lasted him all day.

He hadn't seen Cally, as he promised to, at all. They looked for him anxiously, but he didn't come. His sister feared she had been too hasty in her caution and advice, and that Billy had taken offense. Thus *she* accounted for his absence all day and evening. Molly thought he might have been engaged with his late owners on business, and they might have invited him to dine or sup with them. Cally hoped they wouldn't have wine on the table, if this were the case, and so they speculated, while Billy was upon his back, fast asleep in his hotel, *none the better*, to say the least, for having indulged himself so inconsiderately at Mr. Ballard's generous dinner.

When he rose Billy ordered Congress water (which the servant told him was "the thing" after *eatin'* too hearty) and then took a bath. He breakfasted at eleven o'clock, fixed himself up, and concluded to run down and see Cally.

"I daren't kiss her, though," he said to himself. "The fumes of Mr. Ballard's excellent dinner remain yet, I'm afraid, and she'd detect me again. No, I'll wait till evening. And I won't drink anything to-day with my dinner."

He went out at two o'clock for a walk around the Common. In Park street, as he was returning to the hotel again, a gentleman halted him unexpectedly upon the sidewalk near the church.

"Ah, Master Robson, well met," he said, cheerfully.

And Billy looked up, to recognize one of the owners of the Meteor, with whom he had the day before so pleasant a business interview. The gentleman took Billy's arm familiarly and drew him up Park street.

"Come, young man," he continued, "I'm just going to dine at the club—here. You must be my guest to-day."

And before the boy scarcely knew how it was done, he found himself in a magnificent private restaurant, near by, where, spite of remonstrance, he felt compelled to accept his friend's civility.

They had a fine dinner, elegantly served and superbly cooked, in that choice club-house. And Billy was dined and *wined* again to his appetite's content. For what would a club-room dinner be without its contingent *wine*? thought its votaries in those times.

Billy went home to his hotel once more full. He couldn't see Cally and Molly then, of course. It would never do. And so another day and evening passed wearily away, but no Billy made

his appearance at the humble shop in Cross' Lane, while the two friends could in no way account for this strange absence of our youngster.

Billy rose next day and prepared to reach his friends that afternoon for certain. He was ready with explanations, and started down after dinner (without wining on this occasion), looking very nice and fresh, to see Molly and Cally once more.

The suspicious odor had not been removed entirely from his two sumptuous dinners, and it was not altogether the "scent of the roses that hung round him still" when he reached the little shop, though the hair-dresser had done his part toward rendering Barefoot Billy presentable.

But the boy was warmly welcomed at Molly's humble quarters, and explained how he was detained very satisfactorily, taking care to say nothing about the wine his two well-meaning friends had treated him with.

The attentions and hospitality of those two grateful and really worthy gentlemen were thus bestowed upon their welcomed guest with goodly intent unquestionably, but how immeasurably better would it have been had they exercised discretion with this boy and reflected upon that expressive sentiment they not infrequently uttered during their own Sabbath-day devotions, while repeating the beautiful Lord's Prayer, "Lead us *not* into TEMPTATION!"

CHAPTER XVI.

ALARMING NEWS FOR BAREFOOT BILLY.

Cally Robson had never seen half a dozen sick hours yet within her recollection. Whether it was from over-excitement in the past few days, or from some other cause, they couldn't understand, but she was suddenly very ill. The weather had been raw and cold, latterly, and to Molly's eyes she didn't look well, but Billy had not observed it yet.

The day before this the arrangements had been completed to erect a monument upon the long-neglected grave of their parents.

The slab was of pure white marble, and had been finished after a simple design from Cally's own hand, conceived some time before her brother had returned. It was placed upon its pedestal, over the humble grave, that morning, and bore the following touching inscription:

"IN MEMORY OF OUR LOVED PARENTS,
PLACED HERE BY THEIR CHILDREN,
BILLY AND CALLY ROBSON."

They returned to Molly's domicile, quietly. Cally had again noticed in the hot breath of her brother the odor of the wine he had drunk. But she was ill; the day had been raw, and she had remained in the damp church-yard too long; and so she kissed her brother, bade him good-night, and went to bed early, for she felt greatly prostrated, mentally and physically. Billy did not see her again for five days.

When he went down, on this last occasion, it was after he had sought and selected a small, convenient house at the South End, at a moderate rent, which he intended to furnish prettily, and where he designed to transfer his sister and Molly, if the situation pleased them. And he came now to mention his plans, and consult the others as to their opinion.

But, on this first evening since he last saw them, when Billy reached the shop he learned from Molly, to his surprise and terror, that Cally was "down sick-abed, and in the hands of the doctors."

"What is the matter with her?" exclaimed Billy, startled at this announcement, and greatly alarmed.

"She's been ailin' for a week, Billy," said the woman. "More'n this. Ever since you first come home."

"I had noticed nothing of the kind, Molly."

"No. I'm sorry you didn't. Let me tell you, Billy, in candor, that poor little Cally is worrying about you, as much as anything that's affected her, I think."

"About me? Why? I'm well enough, and I came this very hour, to get you and her to go up to the South End, and look at a house I've fancied will please you; intending to move you both out of this poor place, into a more comfortable home, Molly."

"Well, she can't be moved anywhere at present, I can tell you, Billy; an' the doctor says p'raps she'll never come off that bed alive—poor thing. She's dreadful sick, Billy, that's a fact."

"Why, you astonish me, Molly," exclaimed the young man, removing the new overcoat which Snip had sent him on Saturday. "I must see her surely."

"Not now, Billy. By and by. She's been out of her head this arternoon; and the doctor says she must be kept perfectly quiet."

"Out of her head—in this short time since I saw her?"

"Yes. It's been comin' on ten days. I see it, though you didn't," whispered Molly, sorrowfully.

"You didn't speak of it?"

"Well, I didn't think but she'd get over it. I hoped she would. She's worse this evening than she has been. She's got a dreadful fever. Doctor gives her opium to keep her quiet. But she's in the Lord's hands, Billy. I hope she'll get up. But I hain't seen nobody so sick sence your poor mother died," continued the woman still in a whisper. "She took cold down in the grave-yard t'other day, too; and this has made matters worse."

Billy was greatly shocked at this sad intelligence. He made no mention of it, but now his heart smote him secretly. He thought that perhaps he had contributed in some measure in causing this illness, for Molly said Cally had worried about him lately.

Could it be possible, thought he, that this habit of drinking a little wine occasionally had had anything to do with Cally's prostration! Oh, no! That couldn't be. She wasn't so sensitive, and so delicate as that concluded the boy. And yet she had thrice warned him—with tears in her eyes—to give up this habit.

"What's that!" said Billy, suddenly—startled from his reflections by the sound of a strange murmuring or moaning.

"It's her."

"Not my Cally?"

"Yes. She is distressed, I think, in those fits. But the doctor keeps her still mostly with those powders he leaves me to give her."

"Let me go up, Molly. I must see her, if I don't speak with her," insisted the lad.

Molly beckoned and led the way up into the small, dark chamber over the shop and said:

"Don't talk, Billy. You can see how she looks, that's all. Now come in softly."

Billy would have fallen upon the floor from the shock he experienced the next moment, if Molly hadn't grasped his arm stoutly, and led him out of the room, and down stairs again.

"God forgive me!" cried the stricken boy; "I've killed my sister! She's dying, Molly!" I have helped to murder her!"

And spite of anything the woman could say, Billy hurried on his overcoat and dashed through the shop out into the street like a madman, for the boy was thoroughly awakened now.

CHAPTER XVII.

CALLY ROBSON'S ILLNESS.

Within an hour a handsome carriage halted before the door of Molly's little shop, out of which there stepped three gentlemen, who hastened into the back room.

They were Billy and two eminent physicians he had hunted up, and whom he insisted should see his sister and aid Molly's doctor in this evidently critical case.

But Billy was greatly excited and altogether over-anxious in this business. He had been so alarmed at the wondrous change that in five short days and nights had come over his hitherto robust-looking sister that he really thought she was at that time in a dying condition.

But as yet it was not so bad as he feared. Though as Cally now lay unconscious amid her fever of the brain she certainly looked more like a corpse than a living being.

The attending physician came in and met his two well-known brethren of the faculty in the chamber. They consulted below stairs and informed Billy that all was being faithfully done that could be done by the doctor who had had the case thus far in charge. And having no wish to interfere they retired, leaving Doctor Dowell with his patient.

"You must make me a shake down here, Molly," said Billy, in a softened tone. "I sha'n't leave this house until she recovers, or—"

Poor Billy couldn't finish this sad sentence, and he broke down completely.

"Oh, what a wretched fool I've been, Molly," he exclaimed, in bitter accents. "How blind, how obstinate, how reckless, how criminal indeed!"

For four days longer the fever increased. For upward of a week no nourishment had been taken by the sufferer, and she was terribly reduced in flesh and strength.

Billy remained in the house, devotedly in attendance, and constantly upon the watch for the lucid intervals that occurred, when he could only speak to Cally, and soothe and comfort her in his brotherly, affectionate way.

But she was delirious almost continually.

Yet she did not rave. She was too weak, too utterly exhausted for this. She talked, and moaned, and murmured, incoherently,

or prayed, or hummed some portion of the little tunes she knew in her infancy, and which poor Billy so well remembered, too.

Once or twice she half-recognized her brother at her bedside. Then she exclaimed:

"Why, Billy, saved!" and then went off into dream-land.

Twelve days after she had first taken to her bed the fever had subsided and turned. The doctor could not give any encouragement yet, however, as to the result. But Cally came to consciousness, and whispered, as she recognized Billy and Molly near her:

"Where are we, Molly?"

"Safe, deary—all safe and snug—at home. This is our little chamber, and here's Molly, always by, and here's Billy, too. And, oh, thank the Lord for this hope!" she added, devoutly, as she saw the child's reason apparently returning.

"Where have we been, Molly?" asked the sufferer, still in a faint whisper.

"Here, darling—right here; but you've been sick."

"I haven't been here, too, Molly?"

"Yes, deary—all the time."

"No, Molly. I've been—up—there!" she said, turning her sunken eyes heavenward. "Up—there!"

With trembling hearts both Molly and Billy listened to this sweet child's whispers, as she went on for a brief moment in unconnected sentences:

"And mother's there—and angels, too—and light, and joy. And Billy wasn't there. No—wasn't there! Poor—brother—Billy!"

And then she sank exhausted again, and slept.

Oh, how the boy watched his darling Cally now. With sleepless vigilance, for days together, he came and went, and waited in that silent chamber, where lay for weeks his poor death-stricken sister.

But, in the good providence of God, she did not die. And when, three weeks from the day that Billy first beheld that pale, wan face, sweet Cally woke one morning, better, evidently, and perfectly herself, mentally. Ah! how his young heart leaped up in earnest thankfulness to Him who holds the earth and all that it contains in his right hand, for the hope that now began to glimmer as to her future.

"Dear Billy," she said, in a soft, sweet voice, "I have been very ill."

"Oh, dreadfully so, Cally. But you are better. The doctor says you are better."

"A good deal better, Billy?" she asked, faintly.

"Yes, dearest; much better. And I'm very glad to tell you so."

"You have been here, too?"

"Always—from the first, almost."

"And Molly?"

"Yes, indeed. She has never left you."

"Dear, good Molly!" said the thankful girl.

"A mother to us both, dear Cally," said Billy.

"Yes, yes. Now let me sleep."

And the tired invalid turned on her pillow as her overjoyed brother softly kissed her lips, and tearfully thanked his Heavenly Father again that the sister he so loved was yet spared to bless him.

The days and nights passed silently and slowly for the next three weeks. Cally grew better, almost imperceptibly, at first; but still she improved.

And she could converse more readily and clearly. But it was a slow, lingering recovery. Two months passed away before she was able to be raised into the sumptuous easy-chair which Billy had purchased for her comfort.

But they were constantly together now. And as the days brightened and grew warmer she still improved, and could be permitted to have the light and sunshine in the long-darkened chamber.

And finally she could be taken out to ride a little. A carriage was there every pleasant day, and the fresh air proved a final restorative.

Her brother always accompanied her in these brief excursions, and he lifted her in and out of the carriage as if she were an infant. And she got well at last, and looked prettier and sweeter than ever.

They were separating, after prayers one night, when Cally returned his brotherly kiss, and said:

"You are very kind, dear Billy!"

"Because I love you, dear Cally."

"And you are very good and steady now."

"Always—always, Cally!"

"And no more wine, dear Billy—never?"

"Never! By Heaven's good help, darling, never."

"Thanks, Billy. I have not suffered for naught. You are

saved, my brother; and I will thank the Lord all my days that I have been thus stricken that you might be turned from your error, and that your heart might be given to Him!"

"I shall live to repay you, dear Cally, for your late sorrow and pain, which so nearly destroyed you. My eyes have been opened. I did not realize my jeopardy. I am cured. I am not to blame for unfortunately possessing this appetite; but I shall be blamable if I cultivate and indulge it. You were right. I was wrong."

"And you have signed the pledge?"

"Yes, darling—near a month since; and I shall keep it sacredly."

And so he did—to Cally's joy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ORPHANS' HOURS OF SUNSHINE.

When Cally got out again, the three friends went together to look at the house Billy had spoken to them about; for Molly had been induced to dispose of her little fruit stock, and, at the earnest solicitation of Billy, agreed to join him and Cally in the new establishment as housekeeper.

The house Billy had selected was pleasantly situated near the Roxbury line, in front of which was a nice little flower garden, which afterward served to amuse the sister in keeping the roses and other plants in healthy condition.

The house was neatly and substantially furnished by Billy (who was now eighteen), and leased to Molly for three years.

Meanwhile our hero had frequently met with Mr. Ballard, who was engaged in a splendid down-town business. He had several times hinted to Billy that whenever he made up his mind fully as to what he should do in a business way, he would be happy to advise with him and aid him.

So when all was set to rights in the new home, he waited upon Mr. Ballard.

"You see, sir," said Billy, modestly, "I might have made a good sailor, no doubt, in time, and while I was on shipboard I did very well, but I did not like the sea. I went away because I was branded as a thief at home, and was obliged to strike out for a living. I was, unfortunately, but poorly educated, and this was the best thing I could then do."

"And you did well, as I happen to know," said Mr. B., flatteringly.

"Yes, I got along very well; but no more sailor life for me."

"And what next?" asked his friend.

"That is just what I have come to talk with you about to-day, sir. The fact is, I am not fitted for anything that I know of. I have got about half my three thousand dollars left—after paying my expenses since I returned (the cost of my sister's long, dreadful illness included), and furnishing the house we have taken, up town, to live in; and now I must go to work at something, or else my fifteen hundred dollars will soon disappear."

"Yes; I see."

"I could go back to *Snip's*, perhaps—"

Mr. Ballard laughed outright at this idea.

"Well, sir, he came after me, during my absence—so Molly tells me, and said I was a good boy, and an honest boy, and he wanted me—for Mr. Ballard had found his wallet—and he would increase my pay."

"How much did he pay you?"

"Three dollars a week, sir. And I remember that, at that time, and at my age, then, we all thought it very fair wages, sir."

"Ah, you are older now," said Mr. Ballard, with a friendly smile.

"Yes, sir; and it will cost more to clothe me, as I dress at present," ventured the youth.

"True—and to pay your house expenses."

"Exactly, sir. Now, I really don't know what I can go at; nobody knows me but Snip and yourself. I know no one, and absolutely nothing about doing business, you see."

"Well, I will tell you what I propose, Master Robson. Sit down."

Billy took an arm-chair offered him, in the cozy counting-room of Mr. B., and that gentleman thus went on:

"Your rent, you say, will be four hundred dollars a year. It ought to be a good house at that."

"It is, sir, pleasant and in nice order."

"Then your house bills will average—let me see—say three dollars a day."

"Oh, no, sir! Not so much as that!"

"No? This would be about a thousand a year," said Mr. Ballard, carelessly.

"Not over six hundred, sir, per annum."

"Say six, then—and rent four—is ten hundred."

"That would be ample."

"Very well. Then servants."

"Oh, we sha'n't aspire to servants, Mr. Ballard."

"A servant, then—one, you must have."

"I don't think it, sir."

"Yes; you can't do your washing, take care of fires, chamber work, cleaning—can you?"

"They can, sir."

"Who?"

"Molly and Cally—they always have, sir."

"But, bless me—they haven't always had a lucky brother to look after them!"

"Well, sir—"

"One servant will cost you two hundred a year more; that is twelve hundred. Fuel, lights, water, and incidentals three hundred, say. Fifteen hundred a year, Master Robson, as I reckon it."

"But not as I should reckon, sir. Where am I to get fifteen hundred dollars a year from, pray?"

"I will give you that, Master Robson. You shall enter my counting-room whenever you please. I will employ you as my secretary for the present; give you all the instruction necessary as we go along, and I will pay you thirty dollars a week for one year from to-day. After the first year we will make a fresh bargain, if we agree."

"I think we shall, sir. This is a munificent offer. I accept it with all my heart. But I don't see yet, how I shall be able to earn any such salary as that."

"That is my affair," said Mr. Ballard, kindly. "I know what you have done for me and mine. I know that you are naturally honest, for you have shown that you act upon good principles. I want a confidential person near me whom I can trust, and I want, more than all, to be of service to you—and I will be."

"Thank you, sir, thank you."

"Now, then, when will you commence?"

"Early to-morrow morning, sir."

"Very good. At ten o'clock to-morrow I shall expect you. That is 'early' enough. From ten to three are my business hours. That is all I shall ask of you. This will give you some hours to devote to study, and be with your sister and Molly."

So Billy went into Mr. Ballard's office next day. During that year the orphans saw and enjoyed the first real hours of sunshine in their lives.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE NEW FIRM, "BALLARD & ROBSON."

Molly and Cally were of course delighted with the arrangement Billy had made with his liberal friend, Mr. Ballard.

"That's a man worth working for, to be sure," said the good dame. "No *Snip* about him," she added, sarcastically. "I knew he was an honorable gentleman, and I'm glad Heaven has raised up such a valuable friend for you. Verily, you have much to be thankful for, after your long years of rough usage. But He cares for all who put their trust in Him."

Billy then went into the details of keeping house, as Mr. Ballard suggested them to him.

"My conscience!" exclaimed Molly, at their seeming enormity. "Why, what's the boy talkin' about? Rent we must pay—four hundred. But six hundred for provisions! Who's agoin' to eat on all? As for a servant—no, sir."

She'd never had no such "interloper" yet, and she wouldn't think of such a bother at this late day.

However, they arranged all amicably and pleasantly, and lived very respectably on two-thirds of Billy's income that year.

He placed his surplus, fifteen hundred dollars, at interest, which netted him about a hundred dollars annually, and this gave him sixteen hundred dollars the first year he was with Mr. Ballard.

They were all now very happy, and nicely fixed. Cally went to school for a year more. Billy took to his new vocation aptly, and applied himself with assiduity.

He learned rapidly, as he always had when he undertook to master any work, and very quickly came to understand the routine to which he was assigned in Mr. Ballard's office.

This gentleman took great pains with him, and Billy appreciated all his kindness and care for his welfare. He soon improved greatly in his handwriting, and all his leisure hours were passed in studying how he could best serve his good employer.

At the end of the first year Mr. Ballard voluntarily suggested that they should make a new bargain for the next twelve months.

"Your term expires this week, Master Robson. You are now nineteen. You have progressed admirably, and you are improving constantly."

"Thank you. I try to make myself useful, sir."

"How much money have you left, after paying all your bills, this year, out of your salary?"

"Bills, sir?" said the boy. "I never had any bills. Always pay as I go—cash, sir."

"That is a very good plan, my boy."

"I owe no man a dollar, sir. And I've got over five hundred dollars in bank."

"Out of fifteen hundred?"

"Sixteen, sir. I put my own funds at interest, which I receive one hundred for."

"Ah, yes, I remember. Well. Next year suppose I pay you two hundred dollars a month for your services here?"

"I can't earn it, Mr. Ballard," said Billy, frankly.

"That's my business, Master Robson. For the next year that is the sum I fix on."

"Thank you again, Mr. Ballard."

And out of this sum Billy saved that year twelve hundred dollars. This, with his previous savings, and his original fifteen hundred, gave him over three thousand dollars.

When the two years had gone by, young Robson, now twenty years of age, was a very good man in the office of Mr. Ballard, who had molded him entirely to his own views, and had made him a necessity to the establishment.

But Molly was very economical, and Cally was an inexpensive young lady, and Billy didn't drink any wine—either cheap or costly; and so they got on grandly in their quiet quarters at home, while their provider pursued his studies and his duties with entire success.

At twenty, Mr. Ballard said to him:

"You are now within one year of your majority, Master Robson. You have done splendidly, and I am happy to tell you you have more than fulfilled all my anticipations in regard to you. From this time till you are twenty-one, I shall pay you three thousand dollars for your services."

"You have had this all your own way thus far, Mr. Ballard, and I have only to say that I have no wish to oppose you in any plans you may entertain in business matters."

"Very good. When you are free—a year from to-day, if we live—I will suggest a new bargain again."

Billy devoted himself untiringly to Mr. Ballard's welfare, and at twenty-one he had become the leading correspondent and cashier of the concern. The lease of the house he occupied expired, and as he had accumulated in the three years a sufficient surplus, he purchased the place, and presented it, in fee, on her eighteenth birthday, to his darling sister, Cally.

On the day he was twenty-one years old, Mr. Ballard came down early, and congratulated him on reaching his majority. And within a week the papers were duly signed, and the young man was admitted a partner in that flourishing house.

"BALLARD & ROBSON is the name of the new firm from this date," said Mr. Ballard, kindly. "You have earned your good fortune, through your own persistent aim to deal always justly and honestly. This is but the natural reward of such a course of conduct in life. It may be that the way to this success shall be tortuous, and the road thorny for a time. The night may be dark, but joy comes in the morning. Providence overrules all for good, in the end. I am proud to hail you as partner in this house. I am sure its best interests will be enhanced by this accession."

Molly and Cally had had so many glad surprises in the last three years, that they were now prepared for any munificence on the part of Mr. Ballard. But this last friendly act filled up their cup of joy to the brim.

The new firm prospered, as had the old concern. Mr. Ballard always enjoyed his young partner's society, and so did "Tot" to whom Barefoot Billy was married on her eighteenth birthday; and they all got on together very happily. "Mr. William Robson" proved a superior business man, despite the old associations, which, in his early days, were so threatening to BAREFOOT BILLY'S FORTUNE!

[THE END.]

"DIAMOND DICK'S DEUCE-ACE," by W. B. Lawson, will be published in the next number (77) of the NUGGET LIBRARY.

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